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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 47

Edward H. Able Jr.

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American
Association
of
Museums

July 26, 1989

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
SR-335 Russell Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

We are writing to express our support of the FY 1990 funding for the National Endowment for the Arts as contained in H.R. 2788, the Interior Appropriations bill. At the same time, we must express our opposition to the proposed ban on direct grants to two institutions (the Southeast Center for Contemporary Art and the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art) that have been the subject of controversy in past weeks. This measure seems to be unnecessarily punitive and would create a dangerous precedent for the relationship between the NEA and the Congress. We believe there are other more productive ways to address the issue.

As an example, the AAM supports actions taken by the House of Representatives requiring more thorough review of grants by the professional peer review panels and the presidentially-appointed and congressionally-confirmed National Councils of the NEA and NEH. We believe that this refinement will strengthen the accountability of the agencies in the distribution of federal arts and humanities grants. Further, we support the Senate Appropriation Committee's recommendation to "engage an outside party to conduct an independent review of the process by which the Endowment's grant awards are made." These proposals are measured and respond to the concerns raised by members of Congress and the public over the two grants in question. Any further adjustments to granting procedures of the agencies should be considered in the agency's reauthorization soon to be undertaken by the Education, Arts and Humanities subcommittee.

If the Senate has the opportunity to strike the proposed ban on direct grants, we urge you to support such an amendment. In addition, the record of the Arts Endowment does not warrant any additional punitive funding reductions or further restrictions on its grants process. We urge you to oppose any amendment to cut further the budget or undermine the grants process of the NEA.

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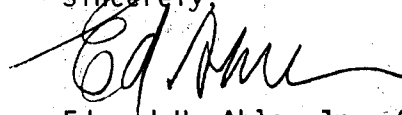
1225 Eye Street
Northwest
Washington DC
20005

Telephone
(202) 289-1818

July 26, 1989
page two

We urge you to continue to recognize the overwhelming value and benefit of federal support for the arts and humanities. We have enclosed a background information packet for your review and purusal. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ed Able', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Edward H. Able, Jr., CAE
Executive Director

cc: Geoffrey Platt Jr.
Director of Government Affairs
AAM members in Rhode Island